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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7697th meeting
Wednesday, 25 May 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Aboulatta	(Egypt)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mrs. Schwalger
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Barro
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Over the past decades, a broad consensus has been built around the understanding that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can only be resolved through negotiations and on the basis of a two-State solution. That consensus is at the core of the work of the Middle East Quartet, which continues to work with the parties and the region to bring about the necessary conditions for the resumption of meaningful negotiations. The Quartet is also finalizing its first report on the impediments to the two-State solution and the way forward. In a matter of days, a number of countries and the Secretary-General will come together in Paris to reaffirm their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution and to discuss how they can constructively support both parties in achieving that goal.

All those efforts, as important as they are, cannot be divorced from the stark reality on the ground that is affecting the lives of Palestinians and Israelis alike. Despite the general downward trend in violence, on 18 April a Hamas-affiliated Palestinian teenager detonated a bomb on a bus in Jerusalem, injuring 21 people, several of them seriously. I welcome President Abbas' firm rejection of that brutal attack. It is deplorable, however, that some Palestinian factions chose instead to praise it. The United Nations is firmly convinced that there can never be, under any circumstances, justification for terror. Days later, on 27 April, a pregnant, 23-year-old Palestinian mother and her 16-year-old brother were tragically shot and killed under questionable circumstances at a checkpoint close to Jerusalem, reportedly by Israeli private security contractors, after allegedly attempting to carry out a knife attack against security forces. However, Palestinian eyewitnesses refute that claim, and the case has once again raised concerns about the need to calibrate the use of force. I note that Israeli authorities have initiated an investigation, and I encourage them to conduct it in a swift and transparent manner.

The beginning of May saw the biggest escalation in violence between Israel and Hamas since the 2014 conflict. Two tunnels were discovered, and Israel carried out 14 incursions into Gaza in order to destroy them and seek out others. In the violent exchanges that followed, militants fired 40 mortars and 8 rockets at Israel, and the Israeli Defence Forces conducted 13 air strikes on targets in the Gaza Strip. Tragically, a Palestinian woman was killed by shrapnel and several others were wounded. Those incidents of recent weeks underscore the fragility of the security dynamics on the ground, particularly the threat to the ceasefire in Gaza, which needs to be vigorously upheld by all sides if we are to avoid slipping into another devastating conflict.

Against that backdrop, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) met in Brussels on 19 April and expressed concern over the damaging consequences of the current political impasse, the importance of preserving the two-State solution and the sharp decline in donor aid to the Palestinian Authority. I am encouraged that both sides agreed to work with donors during the next two years to build a more sustainable Palestinian economy by reducing the budget deficit and stimulating long-term economic growth.

As Palestinians face mounting financial and institutional challenges, negative developments continue in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Talks between Israeli and Palestinian officials on security arrangements for Area A have all but reached an impasse. I urge both sides to continue to work to bridge existing gaps. It is important to strengthen the capacity, capability and authority of the Palestinian security forces in the areas under their responsibility. Continued security coordination between both sides has played, and continues to play, a key part in reducing violence. In that context, I welcome the announcement by Israeli authorities to facilitate access through a number of West Bank checkpoints. I encourage them to make further efforts to ease movement between

communities within the West Bank, including to East Jerusalem.

I take this opportunity to note the continuation of demolitions of Palestinian structures in the West Bank. While the pace has somewhat slowed as compared to the past month, the number of structures that have been demolished across the West Bank in 2016 exceeds the total for all of 2015. At least 900 people have been displaced. Although many of the structures that have been demolished are not dwellings, the loss of water wells, solar panels and animal shelters has impacted the livelihoods of more than 2,500 people.

Allow me to turn now to Gaza, where the situation continues to be desperate and highly volatile. We in the international community have a responsibility not to fail the Palestinians in Gaza. We have a responsibility to help them recover from the physical and emotional traumas of war. We have a responsibility to assist them in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods and, ultimately, to see Gaza and the West Bank reunited and the closures lifted.

In early April, Israel suspended the private import of cement following the diversion of a substantial amount from its intended legitimate beneficiaries. After 45 days and intensive efforts by the United Nations team on the ground, that suspension has been lifted. I highly appreciate the constructive work by all authorities to successfully address the situation. All sides need to ensure that cement is used for civilian purposes only. Individuals or groups seeking to benefit from the deviation of construction materials — for corruption, for building tunnels or other reasons — must understand that they selfishly compound the suffering of their own people and sow the seeds of further violence.

Reconstruction is a lifeline for the people of Gaza. However, Gaza's chronic energy and water crisis needs to be tackled without delay. Today, residents receive at most 8 to 12 hours of electricity. On 6 May the crisis turned to tragedy, as three children from the Al-Hindi family burned to death when their house in Gaza City caught fire from a candle lit during a power cut. It is deeply regrettable that some political factions have sought to use the tragedy to trade accusations and score points, instead of uniting to address the energy crisis.

Gaza's hardships seem to have no limits. Palestinians in Gaza are growing ever more desperate as they see their prospects for living normal lives and recovering their economy blocked by Hamas's military build-up, by Israel's security measures and closures, by the lack of Palestinian unity and the insufficient fulfilment of aid pledges by donors. Recent events clearly demonstrate that the spectre of violence looms ominously over the territory. Unless radically more is done to address the chronic realities in Gaza, it is not a question of if, but rather of when, another escalation will take place. I once again encourage donors to fulfil their commitments to support Gaza's reconstruction, recovery and development.

I welcome the recent opening by Egyptian authorities of the Rafah border crossing on 11 and 12 May, during which just over 2,000 Palestinians entered and exited. I encourage Egypt to explore ways to facilitate more frequent openings of the crossing, particularly for humanitarian cases, while respecting its legitimate and pressing security concerns in the Sinai.

I want to briefly turn to an extremely worrying most recent development, that is, the announcement by Hamas of its intention to implement a number of death sentences. International law limits the application of the death penalty to the most serious crimes and pursuant to a trial and appeals process that scrupulously follows fair-trial standards. I have serious doubts as to whether capital trials in Gaza meet those standards. There are also disturbing media reports indicating that the sentences could be carried out in public. That raises even more alarms, as public executions are prohibited under international humanitarian law. What is also concerning is that the executions will be implemented without the approval of the Palestinian President, which is required under Palestinian law. Palestine is one, and Gaza and the West Bank are its two integral parts. I urge Hamas not to carry out those executions, and I call on President Abbas to establish a moratorium on the implementation of the death penalty.

As circumstances on the ground continue to deteriorate, for many lamenting the disappearance of a negotiated two-State solution has become the default narrative. And yet, according to a recent study conducted by Tel Aviv University, close to 60 per cent of the Jewish population and over 70 per cent of Palestinians remain in favour of conducting peace negotiations. The will to advance towards peace clearly exists. What remains glaringly absent is the political will and bold leadership to make genuine progress a reality. We need collectively to ask ourselves whether those Israelis and Palestinians who today support the

return to negotiations will continue to do so next year or two years from now if the prospects for peace remain out of reach. Prolonging the current impasse will sap any remaining optimism for finding a solution to the nearly 50-year occupation.

Turning briefly to other regional matters, the Council will be briefed separately on Syria this week. With regard to Lebanon, yesterday the Secretary-General and the Security Council reiterated their calls on the Lebanese political parties to build on the holding of municipal elections and to elect a President of the Republic, a post that has now remained vacant for two years.

In conclusion, let me welcome the recent statement by Egyptian President Al Sisi expressing Egypt's readiness to mediate a reconciliation between rival Palestinian factions so as to pave the way towards a lasting peace agreement with Israel. Also, his call to Israelis and Palestinians to continue the historic step towards peace taken by Israel and Egypt 37 years ago must not go unheeded — not in Israel, not in Palestine and certainly not in the rest of the Arab world. I urge Palestinian leaders in Gaza and the West Bank to take up that opportunity and to deliver, at long last, to the Palestinian people an end to the issues that divide and a commitment to strengthen the ties that bind them. I also urge Palestinian and Israeli leaders to engage, through the initiatives put forward, to bring a just, comprehensive and enduring peace to the people of Israel and Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.